

AN INTERSECTION OF FAITH AND POLITICS



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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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Inquiring Words

A Springtime Prayer

O' power of springtime,
Spirit of green grasses
and warm breezes;
Goddess of creativity
of birth
of life renewed
You sing all about us at this time.

The birds call your sacred name.
Buds burst forth with your vestment.
The sun reaches higher into the sky
shining the light of this new day
through the windows of your cathedral,
this world.

O power of springtime
forgive us our speediness
and our racing before your
eternal grace
that we do not see the myriad
miracle world we share.

Open our eyes with your warmth
and our hearts with your beauty
slow our minds with awe and wonder.

Dear Spirit of green grasses
and warm breezes;
let us find here
in these moment of quiet
the grace of your breath
as we breathe into our bodies
the spirit of spring.
Amen

— George A Tyger

It's about timeless beauty

Don't worry! This isn't an old issue of *The Inquirer*. The May Day cover story may seem a bit late. But its message is as timeless as the beauty of Flora on the cover.

After Claire MacDonald submitted this wonderful piece, I realised it could never appear in *The Inquirer* in a timely way, because of all of the celebrations of the General Assembly Annual Meetings which are published in the first week of May. So it's here now. -- Enjoy!

And, speaking of the General Assembly, there were so many wonderful events – that the coverage continues in this issue of *The Inquirer*.

I also have an apology to make. The Unitarian General Assembly sponsored the full-colour edition of *The Inquirer* which appeared on 6 May. I wasn't able to squeeze in the note of thanks until now.

— MC Burns

Political, religious and a touch of pagan

Claire MacDonald traces Flora Britannica and May Day, a celebration with many influences

In 1990 Michael Ignatieff, writing about Easter in the *Observer*, observed that ‘secular societies have never succeeded in providing alternatives to religious rituals’. And he pointed out that the French Revolution ‘may have turned subjects into citizens, may have put *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* on the lintel of every school and put the monasteries to the sack, but apart from the 14th of July it never made a dent on the old Christian calendar’.

My present subject is perhaps the only unquestionable dent made by a secular movement in the Christian or any other official calendar, a holiday established not in one or two countries, but in 1990 officially in 107 states. What is more, it is an occasion established not by the power of governments or conquerors, but by an entirely unofficial movement of poor men and women. I am speaking of May Day, or more precisely of the First of May, the international festival of the working-class movement, whose centenary ought to have been celebrated in 1990, for it was inaugurated in 1890.’ Eric Hobsbawm ‘Birth of a Holiday’

Floralia and Beltane

There’s more than a touch of the pagan about May Day. It’s the ancient festival of Beltane, and it’s also an ancient celebration of fertility — Flora’s holiday, the festival of Floralia in Roman times. Perhaps the astonishing eruption of workers’ rights movements across Europe in 1890, the year that May Day was chosen as the worker’s holiday, was *because* the 1st of May had such powerful pagan folk roots, roots that seem to go deep into our DNA in the northern hemisphere as the bare branches slowly spread with blossom, ‘the darling buds of May’ as Shakespeare calls them.

As a child I remember going to the woods with my brother and gathering heavy sappy armfuls of bluebells, overwhelmed by a feeling of abundant life and deep, deep colour. That undeserved, relentless beauty seemed to me then — as a child in a life in which, at school and at home, rewards were for being *good* — a sign that beauty simply *happens*, time and time again, in love, in loss, in war and in peace.

Eric Hobsbawm was a Jewish atheist, an intellectual and an historian of the left, who died, aged 95 in 2012, so it was to him I turned (through Google) when I wanted to find out where the origins of May Day as a *worker’s* holiday came from. What I didn’t quite expect to find was how that holiday connects to the pagan, to the spiritual, and to the folk past which is still present, even in the Christian year, and to a vision of a utopian future that May Day represents.

When I said there was and is a touch of the pagan in May Day, I mean that I feel it in the May Day rituals that we still have. These are rituals that celebrate the green world — the growing, flowering earth itself — traditions, across Europe, that go way back before the Common Era. In Greece I have gathered flowers for the *protomagia* (1st May) wreath, hung to dry on front doors and then burned on St. John’s day, mid summer,



William Morris's design for Trellis Wallpaper. The Art Nouveau movement caught the May Day spirit. via Wikimedia Commons

when people jump over a fire and make a wish. The pagan or the animistic tie is in the belief that these rituals are *effective*; that we can change the course of our lives with gathering and wishing and honouring the gods, the old gods of the earth.

Eighteen-ninety was an extraordinary year at the end of an extraordinary decade of industrial struggle combined with utopian hope. In many ways the 1880s and 1890s were the original ‘new age’ and the kinds of things we associate with modern ideas, such as natural fabrics and clothing, sandal wearing and vegetarianism, emerging gay consciousness and communal living, were all part of the late Victorian vision of a life that could be very different from the industrial capitalist grind of 19th-century England. It was in 1890 that the magazine *The New Age* was founded in Leeds by AR Orage and Jackson Holbrook, supported financially by George Bernard Shaw. The Independent Labour Party was founded in that year, and the Labour Church.

New life for workers

The idea of May Day as a workers holiday took place at the crossroads of new ideas and the movement for a new life for the people. The Fellowship of the New Life, the precursor to the Fabian Society, was founded in 1883. It included socialist, pacifists and feminists, poets and animal rights activists, vegetarians and campaigners for sexual health and ecological living. They saw the possibility of a new way of living that would encompass health and nature and care for the earth *as well as* a shorter working day. In this heady mix the push for May Day as a holiday arrived ‘unintended and unplanned ... not so much an “invented tradition” as a suddenly erupting one’ as Eric Hobsbawm said, adding:

‘The similarity of the new socialist movement to a religious movement, even, in the first heady years of May Day, to a religious revival movement with messianic expectations was patent. So, in some ways, was the similarity of the body of early leaders, activists and propagandists to a priesthood, or at least to a body of lay preachers.

‘We have an extraordinary leaflet from Charleroi, Belgium in 1898, which reproduces what can only be described as a
(Continued on next page)

Can we recapture the May Day spirit?

(Continued from previous page)

May Day sermon: no other word will do. It was drawn up by, or in the name of, ten deputies and senators of the Parti Ouvrier Belge, undoubtedly atheists to a man, under the joint epigraphs “Workers of all lands unite (Karl Marx)” and “Love One Another (Jesus)”.

The iconography of flowers – and the links therefore to Flora, the Roman and the pagan, and to a utopian vision of the earth connected to a sense of oneness with it – was part of this, and Hobsbawm goes on to tell us that, Flowers appear unselfconsciously round the stern portraits of the seven Austrian delegates to the 1889 International Congress, distributed for the first Vienna May Day.

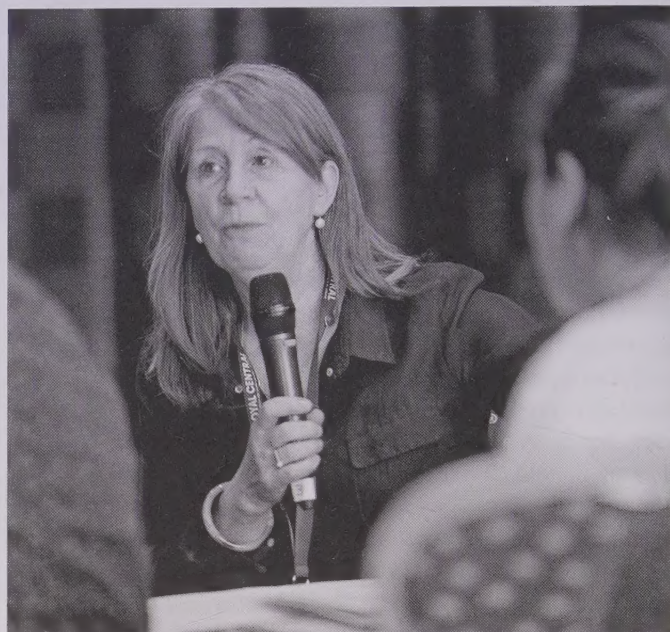
A hawthorn martyr to the cause

Flowers even infiltrate the militant myths. In France the fusillade de Fourmies of 1891, with its 10 dead, is symbolised in the new tradition by Maria Blondeau, 18 years old, who danced at the head of 200 young people of both sexes, swinging a branch of flowering hawthorn which her fiancé had given her, until the troops shot her dead. Two May traditions patently merge in this image. What flowers? Initially, as the hawthorn branch suggests, colours suggestive of spring rather than politics, even though the movement soon comes to settle on blossoms of its own colour: roses, poppies and above all red carnations. However, national styles vary. Nevertheless, flowers and those other symbols of burgeoning growth, youth, renewal and hope, namely young women, are central. It is no accident that the most universal icons for the occasion, reproduced time and again in a variety of languages, come from Walter Crane – especially the famous young woman in a Phrygian bonnet surrounded by garlands. The British socialist movement was small and unimportant and its May Days, after the first few years, were marginal. However, through William Morris, Crane and the arts-and-crafts movement, inspirers of the most influential ‘new art’ or art nouveau of the period, it found the exact expression for the spirit of the times. The British iconographic influence is not the least evidence for the internationalism of May Day.

Beauty makes a better world

The spirit of these movements embodied the idea that we can reshape public good not just by making fairer laws but by working for a more beautiful world. It is an image of public good as joy and hope. The zeitgeist ended with the First World War and never really recovered. The Labour Church movement was short lived, and we don’t think any more about ‘the dreamers of a new day’ as the socialist historian Sheila Rowbotham has called the women of the movement in her book of the same name. It wasn’t long before their natural dress, their flowers and their sandals and their vegetarian ways were being lampooned by left and right as irrelevant and self indulgent. The iconographic style had merely become wallpaper. The Labour Movement never quite looked like this again.

The workers holiday on May 1st looks different in this light. We are used to seeing it now as hijacked by authoritarian regimes showing off military hardware, and we are now accustomed to forms of secularism which are less barefooted and garlanded. But I, for one, am ready for that connection between comrades, earth movements, and beauty, to come back. I am sorry we lost it. And I wonder if May Day is and can be



Claire MacDonald at the recent GA meetings. Photo by James Barry

one of the those places where Flora’s holiday and the workers holiday and the remnants of our need to mark the seasons with earth-based rituals, all come together. May pole dancing and May queens, gathering spring flowers, whatever we do or want to do, and maybe we do more, is a practice of recognition, a response to just being here as part of the arc of the universe. We live under its banner too.

A kingdom of good

Eric Hobsbawm knew all of this, of course, yet his wonderful essay, his many books and his commitment to social change and social betterment, were of a later generation. Born in 1917, his atheism was informed by the tragedies of the 20th century and the belief that we must know history in order not to repeat its mistakes. We must make the kingdom – of good as much as of God – in *this* world, from the broken fragments the 20th century has left us with. In memory of him, I think of the words of the great Unitarian thinker and minister Theodore Parker, ‘The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.’ That moral arc needs bluebells and May blossom as well as barricades and legal justice, and it needs us to acknowledge that religion can also be made and remade in our time as a place of connectedness and flourishing, and that it takes utopian vision for us to commit to that, so here is a little May Day prayer, pagan and spirited, for all of us people of faith – for as long as we commit to good, and to our common future, we really are *all* people of faith.

May our May days be many. May we, as religious liberals, find ways to make connections between justice and love, honouring those who fought for our flourishing and who decorated their banners with garlands. May we live between old stories and new, in peace and joy, borne into the future by the loving hands of those who went before us, who struggled to make our world new and who are always with us this day, in this world and for all time. Amen

Claire MacDonald is a Unitarian ministry student.

Inequality reduces quality of life for all

By Bruce Chilton

Did you have ambitions as a child? Did your parents want you to do better than they managed? What if the inequalities in British society in 2017 are the same as 100 years ago?

There are myths and truths about inequality. A famous myth tells us that highly paid executives are most at risk of stress and heart attacks. The truth is that the people most at risk are the poor.

Professor Kate Pickett, the co-author of *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, told her audience at the Unitarian General Assembly meetings many such sobering truths about inequalities in the UK. Did you know the life expectancy of men in parts of Glasgow is less than the average of men in India? We know these truths because, Professor Pickett says, British research is the best in the world. Moreover, despite many efforts to improve the 'health and social gradients' in the UK, there has been little or no impact.

Benefits accrue to all

Wealth differences among countries do not seem to matter. What matters is the individual's relative position in society and in societies that are more equal, individuals get real benefits. These benefits are very apparent in Japan, which has lower incomes but higher equality compared with the USA with the highest incomes and the lowest equality.

When the effects of income inequalities became known in 2009, as *The Spirit Level* was published, the evidence was highly criticised by right-wing commentators. Since 2009, the evidence collected by epidemiologists is over-whelming and now very clear in 300-plus studies.

So what does income inequality mean in the UK? It means the income inequality is unchanged since major research on inequality was published as the Black Report in the 1980s. The UK is still at the bottom of income equality in Europe and in much of the world.

So what effects do social and income inequalities have? We now know that as they grow, so the 'social cohesion ladder' steepens, that is, social cohesion becomes looser. An example is the levels of trust in different countries. In more equal countries, two-thirds of residents profess willingness to trust strangers. In low equality countries such as the UK, trust in strangers falls to one-third. Studies show anxiety is higher in unequal countries and other studies show depression to be more widespread. Inequality creates what Professor Pickett describes as 'a ferment of distress'.

Inequality invites crime

Crime rates are higher in low-equality countries. Professor Pickett suggests as much as two-thirds of crime are the result

of inequalities. Annual crime rates are as little as 50 per 1000 residents in more equal countries rising to 650 per 1000 in parts of USA. Nowhere is inequality more apparent than in homicide rates. Parts of Canada have an annual rate of under 50 per million residents, compared to parts of USA with 650 per million. In addition, there is evidence that if equality improves homicide rates fall.

Attitudes to crime reflect the inequalities. In most European countries, the age for criminal responsibility of children is usually 14 years whereas in England, criminal responsibility starts at 10 years. In more unequal societies, all the evidence points to high stress levels for everyone and this is reflected in much higher costs of security, such as police, guard labour, gated communities, electric fences and widespread

personal weapons. It is here that whole societies deteriorate and poor relationships break down the very fabric of society.

So what might be done in the UK to reduce inequality? Professor Pickett considers there is much which might be done to give British society the many rewards of equality. An obvious action is reducing income differences through taxation and benefits. And this has been successfully used in the UK before. Between 1950 and 1975 inequality reduced to almost Scandinavian levels, only to climb back towards the inequalities of 1920s since 1980.

Does Britain want to be like the US?

What sort of society do the British really want? Do we want the inequality of the USA? Professor Pickett points to a survey in the USA of preferred income distribution. The results are surprising and ironic. About 92% of USA citizens see the Swedish distribution of income as the most preferable! A similar choice is found in British social surveys. Another surprise revealed by Professor Pickett is that aspirations for equality and its benefits have many British supporters taking action locally. There are now 15 'Fairness Communities' in the UK. For Professor Pickett, a drawback of the UK leaving the European Union may be the loss of research opportunities into UK society in conditions similar to other European countries.

The problem in the UK is the lack of action at a national level. Proposals to return to sustainable goals including reducing inequality were opposed by the former Prime Minister David Cameron. In the 1980s, the neo-liberals and their economic theories of greater freedoms, reduced regulation and 'trickle-down' redistribution of income and wealth could not be proved wrong. Today, these economic theories can be proved wrong and yet we in the UK are persisting in these errors.

Professor Pickett has given us a great deal to think about for 8 June!

Bruce Chilton for the Penal Affairs Panel.

The Spirit Level

Why Equality is Better for Everyone

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

'A big idea, big enough to change political thinking' *Sunday Times*

'A sweeping theory of everything' *Guardian*



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Unitarian approach to lifelong learning

At the recent General Assembly meetings, **Rachel Skelton** presented 'TED', the GA Training & Education Development Project. Here is her update.

The invention of the World Wide Web has revolutionised how we access information, and this now impacts teaching and learning, not just through the development of e-learning courses but at a much more fundamental level. The focus is shifting from a model where the teacher transfers their knowledge to the student in an institutional setting, to one where the teacher facilitates learning through inquiry and experience in all sorts of contexts.

What is interesting is that Sir Tim Berners-Lee's invention has enabled people to learn in a very 'Unitarian' way. Instead of facts and ideas being fed to us in a dogmatic 'top-down' way, it supports a 'bottom up' approach which encourages everyone to go on their own journey of self-discovery in a process of seemingly limitless searching and exploration. Here, the journey is valued as much as – if not more than – the perceived destination. In this way, the World Wide Web has not just facilitated but also inspired and empowered us to be lifelong learners in a way that nothing else could have done. So as believers in the principle of life-long self-discovery, it is refreshing to conclude that this is one area where Unitarians don't need to change – instead a Unitarian has changed everything around us!

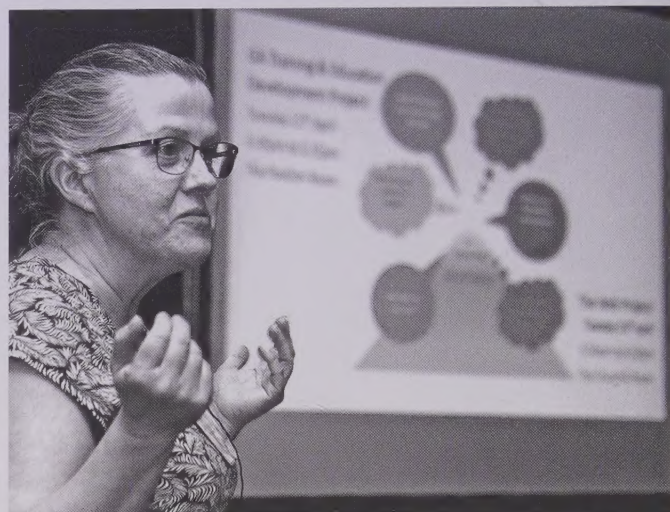
But how can Unitarians make the most of this renewed appetite for lifelong learning? We already provide many learning and development opportunities, but it is not easy to see how these fit together to provide a coherent whole. With a framework to showcase what we currently provide gives the opportunity to map out potential learning journeys and give an overview to identify any gaps in provision.

With this in mind, last October the GA Training and Education Development Project – the 'TED' Project for short – was set up to create and implement a denomination-wide framework for training, education, and spiritual and professional development which could cater for a large number and variety of people, some of whom may seek entry into professional ministry. The framework also needs to be sustainable, meaning that it should be rooted in our Unitarian ethos and values, whilst being able to respond to the changing needs of the Unitarian community, and to those of society in general.

What have we done so far?

Those involved in the Project have worked with those concerned with training and education and:

- Agreed a framework for learning and development that we think:
 - Reflects the ethos and values of Unitarians
 - Reflects current thinking and directions in teaching and learning
 - Can cater for all Unitarians who want to learn and/or develop
 - Is also accessible to non-Unitarians
 - Shows the relationship between formal, non-formal and informal learning
 - Describes a 'learning journey' with the potential for different specific 'pathways' of learning, including one for formal professional Ministry training.



Rachel Skelton speaks about TED at the annual meetings.
Photo by James Barry

ferent specific 'pathways' of learning, including one for formal professional Ministry training.

- Explored how this learning and development framework will be governed, monitored and reviewed.
- Explored the role of assessment in learning and identified the need to review assessment procedures in the context of the developing framework
- Commissioned the creation of a new website – 'The Space to Search' – to provide a learning resource for Unitarians to share their knowledge and experiences and for non-Unitarians to find out about us and join us on our journey of exploration and self-discovery.

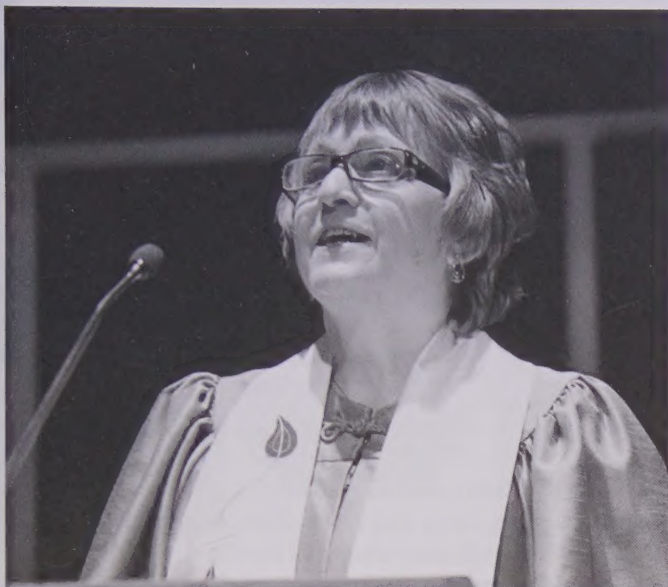
What are the next steps for the TED Project?

- In the second half of the Project's lifespan we plan to:
- Disseminate the framework to the wider denomination, thereby raising awareness of it and engaging all Unitarians in its further development and implementation.
- Agree the governance, editorial and monitoring arrangements for the new website and engage Unitarians to provide content ready for its live launch in the Autumn (2017).
- Consult as necessary to gain a better understanding of our training, education and continuing development needs and priorities, and work to ensure that there is provision for these in the future.
- Agree and implement an assessment framework within the overarching learning and development framework.
- Evaluate existing bespoke Unitarian provision and map it into the learning and development framework.
- Identify any gaps in bespoke Unitarian provision within the framework and explore ways of filling these gaps.
- Consider plans for the continuing implementation of the framework, and development of provision after the TED Project ends on 30 September 2017.
- In the light of this, identify an appropriate system of governance, management, monitoring and review of the framework and put together a proposal to be considered by all concerned.

Do you want to know more about the Learning & Development framework? Or get involved in the next steps?

Contact the TED Project Manager, Rachel Skelton at: rskelton@unitarian.org.uk

An unexpected calling to ministry



Celia Cartwright (left) delivers the Anniversary Service sermon at the General Assembly Meetings in 2012. Sue Woolley offers Peace Vespers as a ministry student in 2010. Photos by Giles Croucher (l) and John Hewerdine.

By Margaret Robinson

'From Pew to Pulpit' was the title of the Worship Studies Course (WSC) workshop at the GA Meetings. The Revs Celia Cartwright and Sue Woolley shared their unanticipated journeys into Ministry via the Worship Studies Course. The workshop was chaired by the Rev Winnie Gordon, who is the chair of the WSC and also mentor for participants and tutors. She is very happy to receive compliments as well as concerns. Districts put on the WSC Foundation Step, and there have been courses in Scotland, Western Union, York and the Midlands. The Intermediate and Advanced Steps are written and sent to tutors to be assessed.

Sue told us that her journey started when the lay leader at Northampton retired in 2000 and people in the congregation led the services themselves. Sue was invited to lead a service, so as she wasn't confident, she phoned her Dad who is an experienced service leader. Sue led her first service in February 2001, which took her four weeks to prepare and timed to the second. For her second service, Remembrance Sunday, she was better prepared, but her Dad suggested she participate in the WSC.

Sue found the feedback from tutors very helpful and the discipline of writing sermons for a fixed topic useful. At the end of the WSC Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced steps she had 28 marked and moderated services for use in the future. She had also delivered eight assessed services and had learnt from her mistakes. Following this, someone asked her if prior to doing the course, she had considered training for the Ministry. She hadn't, but decided to, nevertheless. She was interviewed in January 2009 at Manchester Academy and Harris College, Oxford and started her training in October 2009. Her valediction was in June 2011 and she became Midland Unitarian Association District Minister.

Celia spent a long time in the pews. At age 4 she remembers sitting on small chairs in the Sunday School at Mottram, Cheshire. Her father travelled around the country with his job so Celia attended many different Unitarian churches and remembers the chapel trips, garden parties, etc. At age 12 she had quite a grown up view of church and gave prayer a lot

Two ministers who never expected to lead discuss their journeys.

of thought. She joined the Army and married a medic, but following her divorce she moved to Devon, where she found a very caring congregation at Torquay Unitarian Church. Following her brother's death in a car accident she spoke to her minister the Rev Pat Wormesley. She felt she knew nothing about Unitarianism, but was told about the CLPCW (Lay Persons Conduct of Worship) Modular Course (forerunner of the WSC). There was a module on Church History, which Celia fancied, which included two residential weekends.

The Rev Trevor Jones drove down to Devon and invited Celia onto the weekend held at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. The participants were all asked to deliver a 10-minute devotion (Celia did a 5-minute sermonette/mini service slowly). Then the students had to take the Remembrance service at Hucklow Old Chapel. Celia felt very nervous speaking in front of people. Then on her return to Torquay she was asked to take a service and was determined to succeed. Each of her services took a month to prepare. She then began to lead worship at Plymouth and Bridport.

Later the Rev Pat Wormesley retired and Rev Art Lester mentored Celia for Lay Ministry and she joined UALL (Unitarian Association of Lay Leaders), which is now UALM (Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry). Celia became lay leader of Exeter, Sidmouth and Torquay and then wanted to apply for the ministry (for which throughout she had support from both CLPCW and UALL). After training for the ministry at UCM (Unitarian College Manchester) she had ministries in Rochdale and Kendal and is now retired.

Margaret Robinson is a member of Stockton Unitarians.

British Red Cross thanks British Unitarians

By Feergus O'Connor

Hugh Fenton, Head of British Red Cross Middle East humanitarian aid, came to the recent General Assembly meetings to thank British Unitarians for their generosity in responding to Red Cross emergency appeals for the victims of the Syrian war, European refugee crisis, Hurricane Sandy, the Nepal earthquake, Typhoon Haiyan and the war in Yemen. A full £95,864 has been donated by British Unitarians to the Clara Barton Disasters Emergency Appeal since its foundation in April 2012.

Hugh focused on the two worst humanitarian disasters facing the world today: Syria and Yemen.

Fighting in Syria has forced more than 10 million people to flee their homes, over 4 million refugees being now in exile outside the country. More than 250,000 have been killed and many more seriously injured. Right now millions of people remain in urgent need of food, water, shelter and healthcare.

The Red Cross movement works on both sides of front lines inside Syria and giving succour to those 4 million Syrian refugees who have fled the country. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent is the largest deliverer of emergency medical and food aid in Syria and provides extensive further humanitarian help to other international agencies like the World Food Programme. The majority of Syrian Arab Red Crescent volunteers are now women as so many men have been killed, fled in fear, drafted into the army or joined militias fighting in the civil war tearing the country apart.

As well as providing urgently needed medical and food aid and shelter the Red Cross movement sees as a top priority re-establishing livelihood and employment for adults and vitally needed education for Syria's traumatised children. Hugh also stressed the disastrous effects of the war and refugee crisis on the surrounding countries, which are bearing the brunt of the



(l-r) Feergus O'Connor and EC convenor Robert Ince accept thanks from Hugh Fenton. Photo by Ed Fordham

war and the unprecedented humanitarian crisis it has caused. Over a quarter of Lebanon's population comprises Syrian refugees and there are over 2 million in Turkey alone.

Hugh also strongly highlighted the terrible humanitarian crisis in Yemen, where, according to UN experts, a 'famine of Biblical proportions' is threatened, over 10,000 people have been killed and 'half a million people could die any time'.

If you wish to respond to the Red Cross Syria and Yemen Crisis Appeals please send your cheque, made out to the British Red Cross, to Laura Deacon, British Red Cross, 44 Moorfields, London EC2Y 9AL. Please mark it Clara Barton Appeal. Or, go online to: <http://bit.ly/1RPWrKa> to donate electronically.

The Rev Feergus O'Connor is minister at Golders Green.

Fight against animal testing continues

By Feergus O'Connor

Unitarians nationwide were thanked at our 2017 Annual Meetings for the £9809 we have so far donated, since the passing of our 2015 GA resolution encouraging humane medical research, to Animal Free Research's Gandhi Schweitzer Universal Kinship Appeal, itself a Unitarian initiative.

Dr Alpesh Patel, a scientific advisor to the charity, told us of the launch of the new Animal Replacement Centre (ARC), a joint venture between the Queen Mary University of London's Blizard Institute, a world-renowned pioneer in the development of in vitro human research models, and Animal Free Research UK.

Initially researchers at The ARC, led by Professor Mike Philpott and Dr Adrian Biddle, who have international reputations in their field, will be engaged in research into breast, prostate and skin cancer. The ARC will provide a unique environment where a team of scientists will work together with the common goal of developing, validating and applying human-based models of disease and so helping reduce the number of animals used in cancer research.

It is hoped that this venture, embodying innovative interdisciplinary research and collaboration, could have global implications for the advancement of non-animal medical research.

Among the diverse current Animal Free Research UK-fund-

ed non-animal research projects to which Dr Patel drew our attention were diabetes research at Glasgow Caledonian and Exeter Universities, brain tumour research at Plymouth University, chronic pain research at Queen's University Belfast, chronic kidney disease and toxicology research at the University of Nottingham, medical training and cardiovascular device testing at the University of Dundee, wound healing at Queen Mary University of London and leukaemia research at the University of Glasgow.

Dr Patel informed us that the latest Home Office figures available (for 2015) showed that 4,069,349 animals were used in research in British laboratories. The number of animal procedures that took place in the breeding of genetically modified (GM) or harmful genetic mutation (HM) animals comprised approximately 50% of all procedures. Experimental procedures involving horses, donkeys, dogs, cats and non-human primates accounted for 17,000 of these experiments on living animals. Every day, seven dogs are used in laboratory research in the UK.

If you wish to find more information about Animal Free Research UK's current research programme please see the charity's website: www.animalfreeresearchuk.org

The Rev Feergus O'Connor is minister at Golders Green.

Sex and spiritual integration is possible

By Carla A Grosch-Miller

(Part two of an excerpt from the John Relly Beard lecture at the Unitarian General Assembly. Part 1 appeared in *The Inquirer* dated 22 April.)

Historically Christian theology has recognised three ways God is revealed to us and thus three sources for theology: Scripture, Tradition and Reason. Methodism introduced a fourth, Experience, of which the Church generally is very suspicious, thinking it a 'slippery' cousin to the original three sources. Yet experience has emerged as the *de facto* source that contemporary people trust. I hear it all the time in churches and in the ordination training colleges I teach in: *In my experience...*

My research has been in the area of sexual-spiritual integration in theological education. I interviewed ordinands about their sexual and spiritual lives in order to get a sense of how people make sense of sex and faith, given traditional Christian sexual ethics. I found much more than what I was looking for. I found that sex appears to have a joint *telos* – spurring our developing sense of identity and moral agency (I am and I can) and our capacity for relationship. In other words, through the acceptance and expression of our sexual being, we come to know ourselves as moral agents, capable of impacting others and of forming life-enhancing relationships. I am not saying that we need to be expressing our sexuality genitally in order to grow up; I'm saying that our sexual being – which includes self-awareness, desire, attraction, and for some genital expression, i.e., 'having sex' – our sexual being is implicated in our spiritual and moral development. It is geared towards becoming a person and connecting with others.

I also discovered that we are morally creative, creating our own personal sexual ethics from the soup of our personal experience, our values and commitments, and knowledge about the world. This is my theory of sexual-spiritual integration:

Experience has become a primary source for people apprehending the Divine. I saw it strongly in my interviewees, most of whom were heterosexual. Our sexuality is a developmental project happening mostly beneath our conscious awareness. We gain embodied knowledge about ourselves, sex and others from our lived experience, and take that knowledge into a critical-liminal conversation with other knowledges: our faith tradition, values, beliefs and commitments and other things we have come to know about the world. The conversation is critical in that we ask questions and maybe deconstruct things we learned at our mother's knee. And the conversation is liminal: it is creative. We decide what is right and wrong for us and how we want to act in the future; we glean practical sexual wisdom, which we take into our next encounters with others....and so the cycle continues. We are potentially – if not too traumatised – learning and growing in understanding and agency.

Grace operates throughout, manifesting itself in moments of insight or vision; deepened acceptance and awareness of self, other, the Divine; increased capacity for love; and whenever the soul is moved from despair to hope, from death to new life.

Here are some specific graces I have noticed:

The grace of desire Desire drives our sexual development, propelling us towards self-identity and relationship. In relationship we come to know ourselves and another, and we take the risk of being known. Recall that the Hebrew Bible

uses the Hebrew verb 'to know' to denote sexual relations. It is an extraordinary grace that we are made so that we desire personal fulfilment and intimate connection with others, and that becoming an 'I' enables our ability to connect with others.

The graces in vulnerability Sex is an arena where we are profoundly vulnerable and can be deeply wounded. The word 'vulnerability' comes from the Latin *vulnus*, meaning 'wound'. Sexual vulnerability is inherent, emotional and embodied.

Our vulnerability in sexual desire and expression is what makes sexual encounters liminal, creative spaces from which we emerge changed and through which we create a personal sexual ethic. Our vulnerability, if we are self-aware and thoughtful, drives our moral agency: knowing we can be hurt, we know our actions can hurt others. Here we glimpse several shades of grace:

- ⊕ In the ability to accept and love our imperfect and vulnerable selves;
- ⊕ In the spilling over of self-belovedness into love for others, recognising their uniqueness and vulnerability;
- ⊕ In the crafting – through the trial and error of experience – of a personal sexual ethic; and
- ⊕ In the patient exercise of forgiveness, receiving it and extending it when it is the right time.

Sexual wounds can be deep wounds. Forgiveness can be a long journey and should never be forced; it has many forms.

The grace of honesty There are other shades of grace operant in our sexual journeys. And there are things that are barriers to grace and things that open up the way for grace. I want to speak about dishonesty as a barrier and honesty as opening the gates of heaven. Dishonesty impedes grace. When we cannot be honest about who we are, the consequences of our actions or any number of other things, grace stalls out. We are cut off from the truth, cut off from our natural state as learners, cut off from growing in grace in that particular area of our lives. In Roman mythology, the goddess Veritas/Truth is the mother of Virtue. Being honest opens the way.

There is grace in honest, detailed remembering. In the process of my research I wrote a sexual-spiritual autobiography, which was sometimes hysterically funny and occasionally tragic. One of the most powerful moments was when I excavated the memory of my first sexual encounter. For years I believed that the encounter was 'under duress', and to some extent that was true. But that wasn't the whole story. When I reflected more deeply on that event, I learned some important truths about agency power, knowledge, the culture I grew up in and natural sexual curiosity.

And there is grace in honest grappling with God and all the ways we know of God as we make sense of sex and faith.

The grace of wrestling with angels and demons

The Christian tradition has included some unhelpful, inhumane and even dangerous ideas and attitudes about sex. Christians who take the Bible and tradition very seriously may have to wrestle these in order to come to an integrated, affirming personal sexual ethic. This is a morally creative and graced process.

The Rev Carla A Grosch-Miller is a United Reformed minister and theological educator specialising in sex and ministry short courses for various ministry-training colleges.

Community lives on love in action

By Jim Corrigan

A 17-strong group of Unitarians visited the Findhorn Community in northern Scotland. There, we spent a week living and working with this community, and learning from them. Founded as a spiritual community to live in harmony with others, it lies along the Moray Firth, east of Inverness, near the town of Forres. It was founded in a caravan park, close to the sea – and to Findhorn Bay and Village in 1962.

The 1960s, hey? ... weren't many alternative communities formed then? ... communes, weren't they called? ... yes, I even joined one or two myself ... flower power, pot, all that stuff! Do many still exist today? – Er, no ...

But the Findhorn community is still there. How did it manage to survive when nearly all others failed? This was one of my questions as I began the journey north ... for a week of learning about this community.

To understand why Findhorn has survived for 55 years, we need first to learn about its three founders – all extraordinary individuals. And they weren't hippies, but of an older, war-time generation, deeply spiritual people, with bold, unconventional ideas.

First and foremost, there was a couple: Eileen and Peter Caddy. Peter and Eileen became close friends, both were interested in spirituality, he was a Rosicrucian, an esoteric society based on Christianity. Peter told Eileen he'd had a vision, they were two halves of a whole; they must spend their lives together. Both were already married. They divorced and eloped to the ancient spiritual centre of Glastonbury. In a sanctuary at Glastonbury, Eileen was suddenly re-assured by what came to her as God's voice ... saying Peter and she had been brought together for a very special purpose, to do God's work: *'Be still, and know that I am God,'* she heard (words from Psalm 46). They immediately began intensive spiritual training. Eileen was trained to meditate and wait for God's voice, to distinguish it from other inner voices.

Peter and Eileen ended up running a beautiful hotel at Cluny Hill, on the edge of Forres. They knew they had a spiritual mission, but were still not sure what it was. Dorothy Maclean joined them – now the only surviving Findhorn founder. Also a mystic, Dorothy found her inner God through Sufism. She'd worked in intelligence during the war.

It was a rigorous life: long periods of meditation, developing vegetable gardens, and times in prayer connecting to other global prayer centres. More friends started to join them, word spread. Followers began arriving. *Could they stay and learn from these gurus?* The community at Findhorn grew. But Peter Caddy was strict ... if you wanted to stay, you had to contribute, and if you didn't – you left the next morning.

From modest beginnings, a community developed and survives strongly today. With about 200 people living in the core community in the Caravan Park, another 200 in their own privately owned homes in an eco-village and all living sustainably. The Findhorn Foundation has links around the world, thousands visit each year – for experience weeks, for retreats, conferences, workshops, training programmes. Many conferences take place at Cluny Hill as the former hotel the Caddys ran there is now part of the Findhorn Foundation.

We quickly realised this community has strong rules. One is: If you want to stay, you must contribute. After our



Unitarians at Findhorn enjoy their final celebration dinner. Photo by Chris Carr

morning sessions learning about Findhorn, we worked for the community – in the gardens, or cleaning, or preparing food. I felt lucky to spend afternoons chopping vegetables in the kitchen. This they call *'Love in Action'* – showing your love through your work.

But it was never a case of simply being assigned tasks. Each work group has an organiser, a 'focaliser'. Before beginning, we sat round a table – our focaliser introduced himself, asked about each of us, how we were feeling, in an unhurried way. Then we talked through our tasks, stressing we should work with love and put love into the work, so it would be present in the product. Then we stood and held hands for a group blessing for our tasks. They call this attunement – attuning to each other and to our work. And we all found this made a real difference to the spirit in which we worked.

At the beginning and end of each of our morning and evening session, we 'attuned' too. We Unitarians contributed in other ways – we led an Interfaith service, and we gave evening talks on aspects of our Unitarian faith.

So what did we take away? There was much to learn. There were morning meditation and Taize services. Several of us attended Taize, and found it deeply nourishing. The commitment to sustainable living is evident in the simple lifestyle, vegetarian meals, eco-houses, wind turbines, and ecological sewage treatment works.

Each is entitled to their views, but all respect the spiritual and ecological basis of the community. There may be more 'new age' spirituality today than in the past, but we sensed it was a grounded and open-hearted spirituality, lived out practically.

We gained a deep respect for Findhorn – a community based on the principles of love, and love in action, on living in harmony with nature and the world, and ultimately with the Divine spirit that infuses all life. We can all learn from this.

The Rev Jim Corrigan is minister to the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry.

Attunement comes to GA meetings

By Ralph Catts

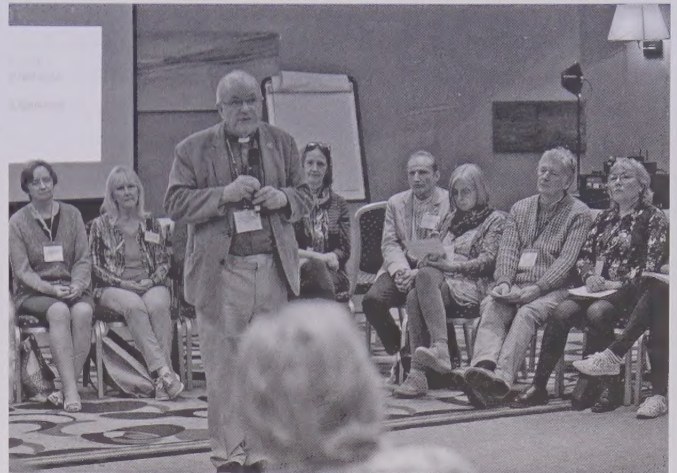
Unitarians who visited the Findhorn Community in Scotland in January, were able to give a flavour of their experiences at the GA annual meetings in Birmingham. (*See story about their experiences on page 10*)

The session began with Riena Jackson (of Ipswich) inviting the audience to join an 'attunement' exercise – the traditional opening of events and activities at Findhorn – linking hands in a circle, becoming aware of your partner on either side, and then gaining awareness of one's wider environment ('attuning' to it).

A highlight involved several who'd been to Findhorn recounting what they'd gained from their week in the north of Scotland: close involvement with a deeply spiritual community; exposure to nature: sea, dunes and sky; joining a beautiful morning Taize worship; contributing 'love in action' through daily work in kitchens or gardens.

A new Unitarian, Chris Carr (of Hull), spoke movingly of how, when first offered the chance to join the Findhorn trip, he had been reluctant and had gone not expecting much. But he said, he had found it a deeply transformative experience.

After the presentations, the meeting elected a committee to take forward the work begun through this first Unitarian trip to the Findhorn community. The new convenor is Valerie Chamberlain, from Bury, Lancashire, and the secretary is



Unitarians who went to Findhorn present at the General Assembly meetings. Photo by James Barry

Riena Jackson, from Ipswich.

The FUN group is considering a weekend reunion at Hucklow, and there is also an opportunity in 2018 to join a further Unitarian Experience Week with the Findhorn Foundation. Details can be obtained by email to Ralph Catts, who organised the previous successful FUN event at Findhorn. Contact Ralph on ralph.catts@findhorn.cc

The Rev Dr Ralph Catts is minister with Hull Unitarians.

Seeing beauty: a love letter to a beloved chapel

By Ed Fordham

This morning I sat quietly in Chapel, the back row today, as my normal usual seat taken by a visitor who had arrived earlier (this is good). The sunlight was bright, low lying today and as I relaxed, contemplated the stillness and the beauty around me I happened to glance up. And there it was – the Chapel's wooden panelled roof I have seen so often before. But today, because of the sun-stream, another feature I had not seen before stood out.

Let me share the roof with you: it is 14 panels long, rising four panels high either side joining above the congregation to the apex of the slow gothic arch that is the chancel arch at the front or the organ gallery window at the back. Each panel (112 in total) is dark, mahogany-stained oak I think, comprises broadly six equally sized planks – all conjoined by a crossing link beam up and down. It's simple, it's fine quality and it's solid. Reassuring.

These panels are supported by eight strong, yet simple, bold wooden arched beams. These beams, holding the roof up, rest down onto the strength of the building either the pillars or the solid wall between windows. This is well built classic mid-Victorian gothic architecture.

But below these roof panels – and this is the bit I have never notice before – is some coving, and then a deep carved plank. Almost like a skirting board between roof and wall. On this 'skirting board' are cut or carved deep into the wood are eight quarter-foils. To be precise, there are eight quarter-foils on



each panel length.

And as I sat there, seeing them illuminated by this brief, glorious low lying sunlight, I realised I have never noticed them before. They are simple and add wonderfully to the design. Indeed, in the gap between seeing them and typing this – the light had ducked, danced elsewhere and dropped – the quarter-foils now almost invisible.

Eight quarter-foils carved in each panel length, seven panels on both

sides of the Chapel, and so 112 in the two matching lengths of the chapels roof support. Exactly the same as the number of roof panels as well – this is clearly no accident. Antiqued. Settled. Beautiful. Charming, all are hiding and perched like wise-owls above me. Ancestors, former worshippers, even former Elders perhaps.

And seeing them gave me cause to stop, pause and think – what else have I missed here, around me, above, beneath and perhaps even within me? And as I rush these questions through my mind, drifting away from the service I pause and smile. That's fundamentally why I come here. And, thanks to the peace of this place, it works for me. To ask and seek answers to this question. What else have I missed, here or in my life? Come and look at our Chapel. I hope the sunlight allows you to see something for yourself as well.

Ed Fordham recently left Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, London when he moved to Chesterfield. Photo by Ed Fordham

Sharing grief is an invitation to holy ground

I awoke last Sunday with this sense that my heart was in a holy place. To slightly misquote the hymn 'I felt blessed with love and amazing grace'. It felt like a week of holy encounters; that I had been blessed by the company of some amazing people, that I had enjoyed some beautiful spiritual encounters.

Now, strangely, I struggled to get up that morning. I was tired; I had gone to bed tired. It had been a very busy week. An intense week, an absorbing week; but a very good week. It had been a very involved but also deeply moving week. The day before I had hosted something I had wanted to begin doing for a long time now, and finally, it had got off the ground.

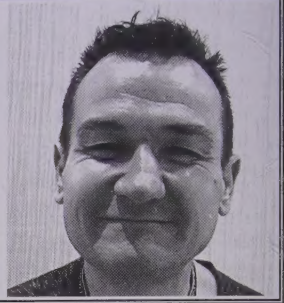
I had felt for a long time the need to create the space for people to come and share together their grief, for the loved ones they had lost, to share their love and to share their pain for their loss. I had not known how to do this, but put my faith in the loving spirit that holds me, leads me and sustains me. So I put something together and I created the space. What followed was deeply moving. It feels like the beginning of something special. I was touched by every moment. It was a deeply spiritual experience and it felt we were truly sharing together on Holy ground.

I say it felt like we were on 'holy ground', but this wasn't because the building was anything special, it was the small schoolroom at Dunham Road Unitarian Chapel, Altrincham. No, we made the space holy by blessing it with our presence. In doing so, in such loving and open ways, I felt the presence of the Divine Love holding us through it all.

The time I share with congregations I serve – especially during worship is a deeply holy time – but not because we are in a building that is any more special than any other. It is just bricks and mortar. It is made Holy by what goes on there and what has gone on there for generations now. We are blessed by Holy ground in those temples of Love because what occurs there is, in my view, concentrated love. We share 'thick time', in what have become 'thin places', for me.

Maybe it's the falling Cherry Blossom, but at this time of year I feel more alive. I suspect it's because I just seem to pay more attention to places and the ground at my feet. I feel deeply connected at this time of year, I feel like I am constantly

From nothing
to everything
by
Danny Crosby



walking on holy ground. I feel deeply nourished by the ground at my feet; I feel it rising up through the souls of my feet. So much so that I want to be like Moses and shake off my shoes.

There's a deeper sense of belonging going on, I feel at home wherever I find myself and my heart is filled with memories. Good memories and painful memories; memories that allow the moment to truly come alive. Maybe this is why I've noticed myself saying 'thank you' a lot to the seemingly inanimate. I can't seem to stop myself offering a constant prayer of gratitude.

I feel it powerfully in the houses of love where I lead worship. They are special places of love and attention. I think attention is the key by the way; it is attention that allows us to bless the space in which we find ourselves. As Wendell Berry once said, 'This place, if I am to live well in it, requires and deserves a lifetime of the most careful attention.' The key is attention. It is by giving a time and space attention that we make it a Holy place. I felt this powerfully as I shared attention with others as we opened ourselves to our shared experiences of love and loss. In that time we made space for the Divine, for the presence of God. In so doing we all make the ground at our feet Holy.

There is something very powerful about coming together in love; there is something very powerful in opening ourselves up to one another and recognise what connects us, what makes us wholly human. I experience this in worship, I recognise this in the deep encounters I experience with people. I felt it powerfully last Saturday as I opened my heart to my love and loss with others. I have never felt more alive. This is holy work and it allows me to live more lovingly with the people I find myself in the company of. Whenever I do, as I look down at the ground at my feet, I want to shake off my shoes for I recognise that what I find myself in is indeed 'Holy Ground'.

We can all bless the space in which we inhabit. All we have to do is to open our hearts and connect to the Greater mysteries of life, to the Web of being, to know the spirit of life and love, to experience God. In so doing we begin to connect to the greater realities and mysteries of existence. All we have to do is to pay attention to the life around us and to touch the people we meet in our daily living. In so doing we make the ground at our feet holy.

All we have to do is shake off our shoes, to feel the spirit rise up through our feet, to recognise that all ground is holy ground, that all life is formed of the spirit and recognise the sacredness of each person that we meet, in so doing we will bless all life with our loving presence.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Urmston and Altrincham.

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